

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

August 2010



The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>.

VA SIMPLIFIES ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE AND BENEFITS FOR VETERANS WITH PTSD A critical step forward in providing an easier process for veterans seeking health care and disability compensation for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was taken with the publication of a final regulation in the Federal Register.

By publishing a final regulation in the Federal Register to simplify the process for a veteran to claim service connection for PTSD, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reduces the evidence needed if the trauma claimed by a veteran is related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity and is consistent with the places, types, and circumstances of the veteran's service. This science-based regulation relies on evidence that concluded that a veteran's deployment to a war zone is linked to an increased risk of PTSD.

Under the new rule, VA would not require corroboration of a stressor related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity if a VA doctor confirms that the stressful experience recalled by a veteran adequately supports a diagnosis of PTSD and the veteran's symptoms are related to the claimed stressor. Previously, claims adjudicators were required to corroborate that a non-combat veteran actually experienced a stressor related to hostile military activity. This final rule simplifies the development that is required for these cases.

The new rule will apply to claims: received by VA on or after July 13, 2010; received before July 13, 2010 but not yet decided by a VA regional office; appealed to the Board of Veterans' Appeals on or after July 13, 2010; appealed to the Board before July 13, 2010, but not yet decided by the Board; and pending before VA on or after July 13, 2010, because the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims vacated a Board decision and remanded for re-adjudication.

The new regulation does not apply to the adjudication of cases where PTSD has been initially diagnosed in service. Rather, under another VA rule, if a veteran is diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder during service and the claimed stressor is related to that service, in the absence

of clear and convincing evidence to the contrary, and provided that the claimed stressor is consistent with the circumstances, conditions, or hardships of the veteran's service, the veteran's lay testimony alone may establish the occurrence of the claimed in-service stressor.

If service connection for PTSD is granted under the amended regulation, the effective date will be no earlier than July 13, 2010, the date the new rule went into effect.

VETERANS' MEDALLION AVAILABLE FOR ORDER (VA News Release) WASHINGTON –The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is offering bronze medallions to attach to existing, privately purchased headstones or markers, signifying a deceased's status as a veteran. The new item can be furnished instead of a traditional government headstone or marker for veterans whose death occurred on or after November 1, 1990, and whose grave in a private cemetery is marked with a privately purchased headstone or marker. The medallion is available in three sizes: 5 inches, 3 inches and 1 ½ inches in width. Each bronze medallion features the image of a folded burial flag adorned with laurels and is inscribed with the word "Veteran" at the top and the branch of service at the bottom. Next of kin will receive the medallion, along with a kit that will allow the family or the staff of a private cemetery to affix the medallion to a headstone, grave marker, mausoleum or columbarium niche cover.

VA is currently developing an application form for ordering the medallion. Until it is available, applicants may use the form for ordering government headstones and markers, VA Form 40-1330. Instructions on how to apply for a medallion are found on the VA Web site at www.cem.va.gov/hm_hm.asp.

Under Federal law, eligible veterans buried in a private cemetery are entitled to either a government-furnished grave marker or the new medallion, but not both.

More information about VA-furnished headstones, markers and medallions can be found at <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm/hmtype.asp>.

CAREGIVER LEGISLATION On May 5, President Barack Obama signed the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 into law (Public Law 111-163). The Act will allow VA to provide unprecedented benefits to caregivers who support the veterans who have sacrificed for this Nation.

Under the new law, primary caregivers of OEF/OIF veterans may be eligible to receive a stipend and access to healthcare coverage if they are not already entitled to care or services under a health plan contract, including Medicare, Medicaid or worker's compensation. Mental health counseling, including marriage and family counseling, will also be provided. Caregivers may also be eligible for travel, lodging and per diem when they accompany the veteran for care or attend training.

VA recognizes there is no blanket solution to implement the new provisions in the Act for veterans and their caregivers. VA will be submitting an implementation plan to Congress for approval by the end of 2010.

VA has not yet determined the amount of the stipend primary caregivers will receive. However, they will be based on the amount and degree of personal care services the veteran requires and will be comparable to the cost of local care-giving services.

VA has designated a Caregiver Support Point of Contact at each VA Medical Center to coordinate caregiver activities and serve as a resource expert for veterans, their families and VA providers. Additionally, programs and resources are already in place for all veteran caregivers including:

In-Home and Community Based Care: This includes skilled home health care, homemaker home health aide services, community adult day health care and Home Based Primary Care.

Respite care: Designed to relieve the family caregiver from the constant burden of caring for a chronically ill or disabled veteran at home, respite services can include in-home care, a short stay in an institutional setting or adult day health care.

Caregiver education and training programs: VA currently provides multiple training opportunities which include pre-discharge care instruction and specialized caregiver programs in multiple severe traumas such as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Spinal Cord Injury/Disorders, and Blind Rehabilitation. VA has a caregiver assistance healthy living center online at My HealtheVet, as well as caregiver information on the VA's main Web page health site; both Websites include information on VA and community resources and caregiver health and wellness.

Family support services: These support groups can be face to face or on the telephone. They include family counseling, spiritual and pastoral care, family leisure and recreational activities and temporary lodging in Fisher Houses at VA Medical Centers.

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024

Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426

6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 352-793-7740

6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 561-649-6489

4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 904-766-5222

Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846

9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

104 Marine St, St Augustine FL 352-793-7740

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>

Property Management (sale of VA-reposessed homes): <http://va.reotrans.com/>

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org

"Florida Vets First:" www.FloridaVetsFirst.com

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov